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# “Gropin’ in the Dark”

By THEODORE OWEN BARKLOW



# “Gropin’ in the Dark”

AND

## Other Verses

BY

THEODORE OWEN BARKLOW  
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## GREETINGS

Gay Christmas-tide is here again;  
I fain would greetings send,  
A little friendship's messenger  
To you who are my friend.

This isn't gayly colored,  
It's only black and white;  
But still I hope that it will help  
To make your Christmas bright.

## GROPIN' IN THE DARK

(Published in Northwestern Magazine, January, 1915. Written after  
stubbing his toes and barking his shins in his room  
at Northwestern University.)

Last night the missus woke me up  
A little after three,  
An' says, "Yew'd better tumble out;  
The old bay mare's got free."  
An' I rolled an' stubbed my toe  
Agin the rockin'-chair,  
An' bumped my head agin the door—  
Yew oughta hee'd me swear!

I stumbled 'round agin, and on  
The washstand, stove an' shoe.  
(Today my legs from knee on down  
Are spotted black an' blue.)  
An' then I found the matches, an'  
I may as well remark  
That all my pains and troubles came  
Of gropin' in the dark.

I've done a lot of thinkin' since, .  
Daown at Sam Watkins' store,  
An' seems to me that anyone  
Who's searchin' after more  
Of knowledge, love or justice,  
Will be sure to lose some bark  
From off his shins while for 'em he's  
A-gropin' in the dark.

So I've come to the conclusion that  
It's only just an' right  
That folks should have to pay the price  
Before they reach the light.  
An' men shall stand an' wonder  
At how they found the spark  
That lit the lamp of progress,  
A-gropin' in the dark.

## THE CRY OF THE LOON

(Written at the age of 14, after spending several months at Camp Kenmore, Ford Lake, near Fountain, Michigan.)

A little lake in the wilderness,  
No surroundings but wood and sky,  
No sounds but the lapping of waters,  
The wind, and the loon's wild cry.

The little lake in the sunset,  
Glorious with orange and red;  
Of a sudden that wild, weird laughter  
Comes as a voice from the dead.

The little lake in the night time,  
Silent 'neath light of the moon:  
Campers, hark in the stillness,  
List to the cry of the loon.

One of the voices of nature:  
Hark! there it comes again.  
Ha! Ha! it laughs at sorrow,  
In a voice that has known its pain.

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## TO AN AMOEBA

(Written while in High School, 1912.)

You find him in a little stagnant pool,  
He crawls along in a peculiar way;  
He stretches out an arm, a jelly one,  
And then he flows into this arm straightway.

He has no etiquette or table manners,  
And when he haps to run across some food,  
He straightway takes it to him and surrounds it.  
Alack-a-day, 'tis never, never chewed.

This animal is very microscopic,  
Six hundred of them fail to make an inch;  
And tho it goes much slower than a snail's gait,  
To put your finger on him is no cinch.

And yet this little bit of protoplasm  
Is what science says we are descended from.  
I do not think that this is far from truthful,  
Considering the manners used by some.

## SUNRISE

(Part of an English lesson in High School, descriptive of  
"A Day in Spring." Written in 1913.)

Slowly, surely, in the east the purple shades of night  
Disperse; the grey of early dawn appears across the sky.  
Filt'ring through the fleecy clouds, behold! the sun's first  
light,

Crimson and gold. Ye birds, take wing and fly!  
Greetings sing to the Heavenly King, who thus wakens  
thee to flight.

(Man, for whom these glories are, still in his bed doth  
lie.)

Amid these splendors all, the sun now shows his gilded  
face,

Sending abroad resplendent beams reflected from and  
through

A veil of clouds which drapes it like a pink and dainty lace.

The crimson pales to orange and the gold is fading, too,  
And Old Sol gleams his level beams into the sleeper's face;

The orange and the yellow yield to deep translucent blue.

And the sunbeams come where the sleeper lies,

And throw their light into his eyes,

And the birds outside his window say:

"Awake! Awake! Don't you see it's day?"

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## SUNSET

(Part of an English lesson in High School, descriptive of  
"A Day in Spring." Written in 1913.)

The Western sky is orange with the light of the setting sun;

The birds chirp songs to cheer it on its way;

The lengthening of shadows shows the day is almost done;

A day of pleasure—glorious, grand Spring day!

Ah, now the golden setting sun takes on a crimson hue;

The sky is streaked with clouds in purple bars;

The descending sun's divided by horizon just in two;

Above the glare shine out the evening stars.

The sun has set, but still the heav'ns are lit with sunset's  
glow;

The fleecy clouds are gloriously ablaze;

Across the Western sky they hang in ribands broad and  
low,

They gather in the heav'nly glorified haze.

The purple and gold are softer now, and from the East  
the grey

Begins to grow and spread. The light

Grows dull; now faint and pale the last few rays of day

Disperse and fade. At last has come the night!



## THE GRIND'S REVENGE

(Written while in High School. The author is not an athlete.)

O the athlete is fine  
When he smashes through the line,  
And when he scores the point that wins the game;  
But in school the morning after,  
When he stands amid the laughter  
And tries to pull a bluff—my! but it's lame!

Then it happens that the jay  
Who is mighty in the fray,  
Is not the guy who pulls the victory;  
But some measly little dub  
Who couldn't even make the scrub  
Is the geek who grabs the "stude" supremacy.

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## “SNOW”

(Written on the occasion of a late Spring snowstorm, March 26, 1913)

The snow, the snow, the beautiful snow—  
I guess it's beautiful—folks say so;  
But seems to me this time o' year  
Snowstorms are out of place and queer.  
Then to a warmer climate go—  
Snow, snow, beautiful snow.

The month of March is almost past;  
April, too, will come at last.  
Flowers of May won't come soon, though,  
If 'stead of rain we have more snow.  
Then to the lower regions go—  
Snow, snow, beautiful snow.

O Spring Vacation cometh soon,  
And then 'tis but two months till June.  
O say, the Summer will be slow,  
If it doth snow and snow and snow.  
Then to old Pluto's kingdom go—  
Snow, snow, beautiful snow.

## LONELINESS

(Published in Northwestern Magazine, March, 1915. Written on just such a day as the verses describe, while recovering from an illness, January, 1915.)

Alone on such a day!  
The sky, a dull flat wash of grey,  
Hangs o'er a scene that's duller still.  
The writhing oaks, with here  
And there a leaf so brown and sere,  
Stand dimly painted on the hill.

Beneath them spreads the snow;  
A running rivulet, the road below,  
With January slime and slush.  
The lowland is a bog,  
And over it the smoky fog  
Drifts lazily through the bush.

All grey without, what cheer  
Within? A silence you can hear.  
Dull pictures; books or music, none.  
The fireplace, too, is dark.  
The slow, slow ticks of hall clock mark  
The flight of time. Alone! Alone!

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## THE SQUIRREL IN THE THAW

(Written the same day as the preceding verses, January, 1915.)

Wee beastie, the weather's grey and drear;  
The snow is dingy, melting, sloppy, wet;  
Your summer brush is sadly draggled, yet  
Your jerky hops and runs fill me with cheer.

Though all the world beneath is dead; and blue  
With cold is every living thing; and life,  
That spring and summer hereabout is rife,  
Lies dormant, yet there's one glad sign in you.

## THE VICTIM

(Written during his Sophomore year at Northwestern University.  
Published in Northwestern Magazine, May, 1915.)

I have been warned what is the poet's fate;  
I know it, and I dread the dreary curse  
That falls on him; yet still I hesitate,  
And still plod on and on at writing verse.

I feel that if I do not soon control  
My pen, my pen will get the upper hand,  
And I, a ruined man with harassed soul,  
In some dark, lonely garret room will land.

It does not pay, I know, it does not pay  
To write what people will not read; and yet—  
It's hard, it's very hard, to break away  
When you can write this stuff,—or to forget.

There's a pleasure just in stringing words together,  
There's a charm in writing things to make them rime.  
And it's soothing just to write about the weather,  
And the whole thing gets a hold on you in time.

A hold that's centered deep within your heart;  
I've tried to shake it off; I've failed, you see;  
I'll try once more; I'll tear myself apart—  
My brain and body's master must be ME!

---

## SPRING FEVER

(Written at the close of his Sophomore year at Northwestern  
University, 1916.)

There's a sort of lazy feeling in the warm, sunshiny day,  
And it over you is stealing as you lay your work away;  
Tho you know you ought to hustle—got a lot of work to do—  
And you feel that all the bustle in the world won't get you  
thru,  
Still you just can't seem to force yourself to do it.

No, the spring is in the air, boys, and it's getting in your  
blood,  
As you capless bathe your hair, boys, in the April breezes'  
flood;  
You get tired without a reason; you take naps beneath the  
trees,  
For it's now the vernal season; any symptoms such as  
these  
Mean that you have got spring fever—and you'll rue it.

## DIAMONDS IN THE SNOW

(Written during the Winter of his Sophomore year at Northwestern University, February, 1916.)

One great delight which I in winter know,  
Is, on some cold, clear, moonlit night,  
To walk beneath that ivory bubble's light.  
Across the untrod blanket white I go,  
And where the myriad moonbeams strike it, lo!  
A thousand tiny sparks, so clear, so bright,  
I see there dancing, dazzling to the sight—  
Like diamonds scattered broadcast o'er the snow.

What think you, friend, of these bright gems of mine?  
They're priceless—they cannot be bought for gold,  
Nor thieves break in and steal. You'll see  
Never a stone of water half so fine  
In kingly crown as these of Winter's cold—  
For all true beauty in this world is free.

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## MY MUSE

(Published in Northwestern Magazine, November, 1915.)

I met a fairy once; we strolled  
Along the margin of the lake.  
The moon, a silver bubble, rolled  
Low o'er the trees, while she me told  
Stories that might my fortune make,  
Could I but sell them, and the money take.

A friend indeed she was that night,  
And oh! the noble thoughts that came  
Flocking like wild ducks in their flight,  
Quick answer to her tones so bright.  
She's left me now, and it's a shame;  
You see, Imagination was her name.

## A SONG OF POLITICS

(Apologies to Mother Goose)

Sing a song of politics,  
Barrel full of pork;  
Scores of wicked grafters  
In Chicago and New York.  
Police investigations,  
Incompetence and waste,  
Is this not a lovely dish,  
And to the voter's taste?

Father's in his office,  
Making piles of money;  
Sister's busy dancing  
The Tango and the Bunny;  
Mother's got her hands full  
Buying winter clothes;  
What recks the politician  
Of voters such as those?

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## APOLOGIA

(Written near the end of his Sophomore year at Northwestern University, 1916.)

The editor, she comes to me  
And says to me, "Produce!  
Accelerate your Pegasus—  
Or is it out of juice?"  
I said to her, "I'm sorry, but—  
"Twon't do no good to fuss—  
My Pegasus may be a Ford,  
But it's no jitney bus."





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